

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

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USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

S E C R E T JIDDA 6707

EXDIS

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SA

SUBJECT: OMAR SAQQAF'S DEATH AND SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY

REF: JIDDA 6690

SUMMARY: THE DEATH OF MIN STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OMAR SAQQAF WILL NOT HAVE HAVE A PROFOUND OR LASTIN EFFECT ON
SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY. THE MAIN LINES OF SAUDI POLICY WILL
CONTINUE AND NORMAL BUSINESS WILL GO ON FOR A TIME AT A
SLOWER PACE. THE KING, HOWEVER, HAS LOST ANOTHER TRUSTED
ADVISOR. SAQQAF WAS INTELLIGENT AND REASONABLE AND HAD
READY ACESS TO THE KING. HE WAS "PRO-AMERICAN" BECAUSE
THAT'S WHERE HE SAW SAUDI INTERESTS. SAQQAF HAD BECOME A
CONFIRMED CONVERT TO THE SECRETARY'S POLICY OF A STEP-BY-
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STEP APPROACH TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. HE WAS ABLE

TO CALM THE KING'S IMPATIENCE AND DEFLECT HIS ORIGINAL INSISTENCE ON AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT. IN OTHER WAYS ALSO, ONCE CONVINCED OF THE CORRECTNESS OF US POLICY, SAQQAF WAS AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE WITH THE KING. MOREOVER, HE WAS A VOICE OF MODERATION IN ARAB COUNCILS, FREQUENTLY PUTTING FORTH THE AMERICAN VIEW POINT. AT LEAST FOR A TIME, HIS DEATH MAY MEAN A REDUCTION IN THE ABILITY OF THE US TO INFLUENCE SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY. END SUMMARY.

1. THIS TELEGRAM ON THE EFFECT OF OMAR SAQQAF'S DEATH SUPPLEMENTS THE INFORMATION IN THE REFTEL WHICH FOCUSED LARGELY ON THE PROBLEM OF FINDING A SUCCESSOR. SAYYID OMAR SAQQAF WAS NOT A VERY EFFECTIVE HEAD OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY (SAQQAF'S TITLE WAS MIN STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS; THE KING IS FOREIGN MINISTER). HE TOOK CHARGE OF THE MINISTRY AT A TIME WHEN SAUDI ARABIA HAD BUT FEW IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY CONCERNS. HE NEVER ADJUSTED HIS PERSONAL STYLE AS MINISTER TO SAUDI ARABIA'S VASTLY INCREASED WORLD STATURE. THIS OFTEN MEANT AGONIZING SLOWNESS IN DECISION MAKING SINCE EVEN RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT THINGS WERE REFERRED TO HIM FOR DECISION. ALL DEPENDS ON HIS SUCCESSOR, BUT IT IS CONCEIVABLE--IF THE RIGHT MAN IS CHOSEN-- HE WOULD MAKE MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S INCREASINGLY CAPABLE STAFF AND ADOPT A MORE SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO MAKING DECISIONS (SEE REFTEL).

2. AS A RESULT OF THE SAUDI TENDENCY TO REFARD TO OTHER STATES OF THE PENINSULA AS NOT QUITE FOREIGN, NEITHER SAQQAF PERSONALLY NOR THE FOREIGN MINISTRY EXERCISED MUCH INFLUENCE OVER RELATIONS WITH THE GULF STATES AND THE YEMENS AND THESE RELATIONS WILL BE UNAFFECTED BY HIS DEATH.

3. SAQQAF HAD RECENTLY SPENT A GOOD DEAL OF TIME DEVELOPING SA'S RELATIONS WITH FAR EASTERN STATES AND THESE COUNTRIES WILL FEEL HIS PASSING. SAQQAF'S GREATEST INTEREST WAS IN RELATION WITH THE WEST (PARTICULARLY THE US) AND OTHER ARAB STATES.

4. SAQQAF HAD LONG BEEN AN ADVOCATE OF CLOSE RELATIONS
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WITH THE US BECAUSE HE SAW SA'S INTERESTS AS BEING BEST SERVED IN THIS WAY. NOT ONLY WAS HE INTELLIGENT AND RELATIVELY OPEN-MINDED, BUT HE WAS LIKED, RESPECTED AND LISTEND TO BY THE KING. SAQQAF WOULD LISTEN TO NEW IDEAS AND WAS CAPABLE OF BEING PERSUADED OF THEIR CORRECTNESS. IT WAS IN THIS WAY THAT SAQQAF BECAME PERSUADED OF THE NECESSITY OF THE SECRETARY'S STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST; HAVING BEEN HIMSELF CONVINCED

HE WAS ABLE TO PERSUADE THE KING TO GIVE THIS POLICY A CHANCE TO WORK. THIS IS BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT EXAMPLE OF THE ROLE SAQQAF FREQUENTLY PLAYED IN INTERPRETING US POLICIES TO THE KING AND HIS POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO FURTHERING THE DEVELOPMENT OF US-SAUDI COOPERATION. MOREOVER, SAQQAF NOT INFREQUENTLY PLAYED A SIMILAR ROLE IN ARAB COUNCILS WHERE US POSITIONS WERE NOT ALWAYS ACCEPTED, BUT GENERALLY GOT A FAIR HEARING. IN TERMS OF US POLICY INTERESTS, SAQQAF WILL BE MISSED AS A RELIABLE ACONDUIT TO THE KING AND TO OTHER ARAB LEADERS AS WELL AS FOR HIS OWN INTELLIGENCE AND REASONABLENESS.

5. IN ARAB AFFAIRS SAUDI ARABIA HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN POISED BETWEEN THE ARAB "POWERS" SYRIA AND EGYPT AND WITHIN THE SAUDI ESTABLISHMENT THERE ARE THOSE WHO FAVOR LEANING TOWARDS ONE OR THE OTHER. SAQQAF FAVORED SYRIA AND DID NOT HAVE A TERRIBLY HIGH REGARD FOR EGYPT. HIS DEATH WILL NOT NECESSARILY MEAN A MORE PRO-EGYPTIAN POLICY, BUT THERE WILL BE ONE LESS CHECK ON THOSE URGING CLOSER SAUDI-EGYPTIAN COOPERATION. RELATIONS WITH SYRIA WILL NOT SUFFER BUT THE SYRIANS WILL MISS SAQQAF AS A TRUSTED CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATIONS.

6. AN INCALCULABLE EFFECT OF SAQQAF'S DEATH WILL BE ON THE QUALITY AND BALANCE OF THE KING'S DECISION-MAKING IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. SAQQAF WAS ONE OF A SMALL NUMBER OF DISINTERESTED NON-ROYAL ADVISORS WHOSE OPINION THE KING LISTENED TO. ONE OR MORE PERSONS WILL FILL THE GAP HE HAS LEFT AS FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISOR TO THE KING, BUT IT IS ALL TOO POSSIBLE THAT THEY WILL LACK SAQQAF'S INTELLIGENCE AND PERCEPTION AS WELL AS BE LACKING IN DISINTEREST. IN SAUDI ARABIA WHERE ALL DECISIONS MAY ULTIMATELY BE DECIDED BY THE KING, THE QUALITY OF THE ADVICE HE RECEIVES IS OF

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